WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

S.T.D. facilities in villages to the nearby town

*65. SHRI S. K. T. RAMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of towns provided with S.T.D. facilities so far;

(b) the number of additional towns proposed to be taken up in 1991-92 for the provision of S.T.D. facilities;

(c) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to link the villages to the nearby towns to extend the S.T.D. facilities there; and

(d) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (DR. SANJAYA SINH): (a) 1050 Towns have been provided with STD facility upto 1-2-1991.

(b) 360 more towns are planned to be provided STD facilities during 1991-92.

(c) and (d) The 8th plan objectives for provision of STD facilities are as follows:

(i) All District Headquarters not provided with STD facilities upto the end of 7th plan;

(ii) All Sub-divisional headquarters/ equivalent Tehsils/Block development headquarters;

(iii) All tourists, pilgrimage and growth centres;

(iv) All telephone exchanges of capacity 500 liens or more, as on 1-4-90.

(v) Other auto exchanges justified by traffic and subject to feasibility.

Villages satisfying criterion mentioned above will also be provided with S.T.D. facility. However, the number of such villages may be very small.

Seminar organised by the Indian astornomical Society at Calcutta

*66. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: SHRI KAPIL VERMA:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of a paper submitted at a Seminar organised by the Indian Astronomical Society at Calcutta recently in which it was stated that vital fumes in the Gulf War will severely damage the eco-system and release forces that will interfere with atmospheric temperature and rainfall patterns even in India, if so, what is the reaction of Government thereto;

(b) what is Government's information about the likely impact of the Gulf war of Indian environment and eco-system and what steps Government propose to take in this regard; and

(c) whether the farmers who depend upon rainfall for the sowing of their winter crops, particularly in the arid regions of Rajasthan has been cautioned in this regard, if so, what are the details thereof, and if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) A seminar on 'Sun and our Environment' was organised under the auspices of Indian Astronomical Society and Birla Planetarium at Calcutta on 7 and 8 February, 1991 wherein eight papers were presented. One of the papers expressed the view that the soot and toxic emissions from oil field fires in the Gulf war will severely damage our eco-system and release forces that will interfere with temperature and rainfall patterns in India. An examination of this in consultation with the Indian Meteorological Department shows that the soot and emissions as a result of fires which have occurred so far in the Gulf have not so far affected weather over India nor are these likely to affect the monsoons. The situation is being closely monitored and action will be taken as warranted.

(b) and (c) Based on the data available so far and the analysis done, the Government is of the view that there is no cause for immediate concern regarding the impact of Gulf war on Indian environment. The situation is, however, being monitored closely. Specific tasks allotted to Departments for continuous monitoring and study include collection of data from local and international sources, monitoring the position of the oil slick, analysis of biological samples from marine waters and studying the weather patterns closely to detect any effect on our environment.

Foreign visits by the Minister of External Affairs for settlement of the Gulf Crisis

*68. SHRI M. M. JACOB:
DR. BAPU KALDATE:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether he has recently visited a number of foreign countries for finding an early and peaceful settlement to the Gulf war;

(b) if so, the names of the countries which he has visited;

(c) the names of the VIPs he has met;

(d) the nature of the talks held and the outcome of the talks; and

(e) whether any progress has so far been made in the matter?

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI CHANDRA SHEKHAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The then External Affairs Minister visited Yugoslavia from the 21st to the 23rd January. During his visit, he called on President Borisav Jovic and Prime Minister Ante Markovic and held discussions with Yugoslav Foreign Minister Budimir Loncar. He visited Tehran on the 26th January and met President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. He again visited Belgrade on 12th February at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia to attending the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of 16 NAM countries.

(d) and (e) The talks centred round the search for an approach to bring the Gulf war to an end and restore peace in the region. Unfortunately, these efforts did not yield the desired result and ground action which we all wanted to prevent, has now commenced.

Shortage of passport books

*69. SHRI VITHALBHAI M. PATEL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a shortage of Passport Books at different Passport Offices in the country;

(b) whether it is also a fact that Government Press is not in a position to cope with the demand of the Passport Books;

(c) if so, whether there is any proposal for printing the Passport Books in a private press;

(d) the number of passport applications pending at the Regional Passport Office, Ahmedabad at present; and

(e) by when the pending applications are likely to be cleared?

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI CHANDRA SHEKHAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Yes Sir.

(d) 1845 applications were pending on 15 February 1991 for want of booklets. Another 10838 applications received in recent months are under process.

(e) 8000 passport booklets were supplied to Passport Office, Ahmedabad in February 1991 and arrears will be cleared thereafter in two months.

Sino-Indian Border Dispute

*70. SHRI DHULESHWAR MEENA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the outcome of the recent talks which the Minister had held with the Chinese leaders on the Sino-Indian border dispute during his visit to Beijing;